

Michel-Pitot House
1370 Moss Street
New Orleans
Orleans Parish
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1116

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PHOTOGRAPH
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MICHEL-PITOT HOUSE

HABS No. LA-1116

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LA

Address: 1370 Moss Street, Orleans Parish, New Orleans,
Louisiana.

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Present Owner Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart.
and Occupant:

Present Use: Convent

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

This old house overlooking Bayou St. John, although often referred to as the Ducayet house, might more properly be called the Michel-Tissot house, for these two prominent New Orleans families were its owners for longer periods than any of its other numerous former owners. The Albin Michel family owned it from 1819 until 1848, a period of twenty-nine years, and the Tissot family were its owners from 1858 until 1894, a period of thirty-six years. The present owners, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, however, have possessed it for fifty-nine years, ever since it was purchased for them in 1904 by their sainted Mother General Frances Xavier Cabrini, first canonized citizen of the United States. The Nuns have occupied it as a convent since about 1935.

Titles to the land upon which it stands can be traced in direct succession back to concessions granted on November 28, 1708, when Mobile was the capital of the French Province of Louisiana and the 1718 founding of New Orleans was still ten years in the future. This area along Bayou St. John has thus been inhabited by Europeans longer than any other area within the present limits of the city of New Orleans.

Of this first attempt at settlement along the banks of Bayou St. John, Professor Marcel Giraud in his Histoire de la Louisiane Francaise, Le Regne de Louis XIV, (p. 175) says:

"Less happy had been the attempt of a small number of inhabitants to establish themselves between Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi on the site that Saint Denis had assigned to the small tribe of the Biloxi Indians in order to place them in more immediate reach of the Mississippi Fort, and that because of this fact, was designated under the name of Biloxi. It was concerned with the region of Bayou St. John, the Soupicatcha of Penigaut, near the portage which permitted access to the river. 'Bilochy - - - is an Indian establishment situated on Lake Pontchartrain, from which establishment a portage of a league is made to reach the Missicipy.' The experiment began in 1708, conducted by five or six colonists who hoped to find there soils 'proper for sowing.' The beginnings were satisfactory. At the end of the year, d'Artaguiette could report that each of them had put

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under cultivation on the east bank of the bayou, one arpent of land, and expected good results from it."

The experiment ended in failure because of the little knowledge the settlers had of the soil and climate. At least one of them, however, remained. This was Antoine Rivard de Lavigne to whom a concession of two-and-a-half arpents along Bayou St. John, extending back as far as Bayou Gentilly, had been granted by Bienville in 1708. A survey made in 1800 by Don Carlos Trudeau, Spanish Royal surveyor (P. Pedesciaux, Vol. 55 f. 462), shows that the property now occupied by the Michel house was part of this first concession. This same survey also shows that the adjacent two-and-a-half arpents on the south side originally granted to Nicholas de Olon in 1708 was sold to Antoine Rivard de Lavigne on October 3, 1718. A few days later, on October 16, Rivard de Lavigne also bought the three arpents to the north of his original grant, the concession that had been made to Baptiste Poirier (Batista Poyrier on the Spanish map) in 1708. On June 1, 1720 he bought the next three arpents north from Maturin and on October 4, 1720 he bought three more arpents that had been granted in 1718 to the noted Louisiana historian Le Page du Pratz. Finally the three arpents that separated this last purchase from his other properties was granted to Rivard de Lavigne on February 5, 1721. Thus he owned a total of 17 arpents (191' 10" 6") along the bayou extending back as far as Bayou Gentilly. In a memoire on Louisiana, presumably written by Bienville about 1726 (MPA III p 516) it is stated that Rivard, "a good settler on this bayou" had offered to clear the bayou of tree trunks "and to fell all the trees that hang over the banks and threaten to fall into it." In return for this work he requested the rest of the land on the east side of the bayou as far as the lake.

In his Historie de la Louisiane (Vol 1 p 82), Le Page du Pratz first refers to the bayou as "Tchoupic" where he arrived in 1718. "The Sieur Lavigne, Canadian, lodged me in a cabin of the Aquelon-Pissas, from whom he had bought the village; he gave others of them to my workmen to lodge themselves. . . . I was seeking a site on the Bayou St. John, at a short half league from the spot where the capital was to be founded, that was as yet marked only by a hut roofed with palmetto leaves that the Commandant (Bienville) had had built to lodge himself." Le Page then continues: "I built a hut on my plantation, about twenty five toises [150'] from the Bayou St. John, while waiting until I could have my house built, and lodgings for my people. As my hut was composed of extremely combustible materials I had the fire built at a great distance to avoid accidents, so that the fire was almost half way from the Bayou." He then describes alligators along the bayou and says that although he enjoyed his plantation he decided to give it up and go to Natchez. His is perhaps the earliest description of life along Bayou St. John.

An interesting account of the Rivard family is given in Arthur and Kernion's Old Families of Louisiana, (pp. 303-06). Antoine Rivard died on his Bayou St. John plantation on February 11, 1729, being at the time one of the "Marguilliers" or Church wardens of the parish church

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of St. Louis. His son died six years later and the plantation was inherited by his widow who in 1736 married Jean Francois Huchet de Kernion. On June 13, 1769, de Kernion also died on this bayou plantation and on November 15, 1771 before the notary J. B. Garic (vol 2 f. 328) his son Rene Huchet de Kernion sold the property to Don Santiago Lorreins, called Tarascon. In this act of sale it is stated that the plantation, located a league from the city, extended for 22 arpents along the Bayou by a depth of 40 arpents which de Kernion had inherited from his father. On it was a two-story house, another small one-story one, and a kitchen, an office, and warehouse. It is impossible to know just where these buildings were located on this large plantation.

When Santiago Lorreins died on June 29, 1784, an inventory was made of the estate (LHQ 24 p. 267). Don Santiago, a native of Avignon in France, left three children one of whom was the wife of Louis Allard whose plantation across the bayou was to become City Park. In the inventory, besides the cattle, tools, and slaves, two plantations on Bayou St. John were listed. The first, measuring 20 arpents on the bayou, contained "A new house 34 feet front with the same depth, with 4 rooms, a gallery 8 feet wide on 3 sides, a kitchen, 1 store room, 6 cabins for negroes have been built on this land near another house with a storeroom in bad condition." Besides, there were various fruit trees. The second house mentioned was probably the old house of the de Kernion plantation. The new house had been built by Lorreins and was probably quite like the old house still standing at 1370 Moss Street with one of the side galleries incorporated into the house in some later alteration.

The other plantation contained 8 arpents front to the Bayou and had various fruit trees and "upon which a house has been built measuring 40 feet front with back and front galleries, together with a new store room 30 feet front by 16 deep." This second house was no doubt like the one at 1300 Moss Street. It is doubtful, however, that either of the Lorreins houses are still standing.

The plantation was eventually inherited by Lorreins' son, Santiago Bautista Lorreins who on October 9, 1799 sold a small part of it measuring 200 feet along the Bayou and three arpents in depth. This according to the Trudeau survey of 1800 was the site of the house, now 1370 Moss Street. No mention of buildings is made in this act of sale. However, when the purchaser, Don Bartolome Bosque sold it on May 28 of the next year, 1800, to Joseph Reynes, buildings existed and the sale price had increased from \$1,222 to \$1,525. On August 19, 1800, Lorreins sold to Reynes the additional 12 arpents and 20 toises, behind the 200 foot by three arpent plot he had first sold to Bosque.

On June 22, 1805 Reynes sold the two properties to the widow of Vincent Rillieux "with all the buildings." Madame Rillieux sold the property on April 3, 1810 with its buildings to James Pitot who had served as second mayor of New Orleans in 1804, 1805. Pierre Pedesclaux

was the notary who passed all these acts of sale. At this time Andre Fernandez owned the adjacent property above and Louis Fortin below. Santiago Lorreins had by this time sold off the rest of his plantation in smaller parcels.

James Pitot lived here for only three years when he sold it with an adjacent property that he had bought from David Oliver on March 25, 1811. (M. de Armas, notary). Purchasers in this sale were Beverly Chew and Richard Relf, business associates of the noted Daniel Clark, who incidentally, held a \$6,080 mortgage on Pitot's 200' property. About this time Clark also built a fine mansion nearby on the Bayou. (Harmon, The Famous Case of Myra Clark Gaines, pp. 124-26).

Five days after Pitot passed the act of sale to Chew and Relf before the Notary Stephen de Quinones, his wife appeared before the same notary (August 30, 1813) and agreed to the sale, renouncing her rights on this property as well as on other property in the Vieux Carré also sold by Pitot. On the same day Chew and Relf transferred the bayou properties to the Bank of Louisiana. In all these latter acts of sale and renunciation the 200' property on the Bayou is said to conform "to the plan drawn by the Sr. Charles Trudeau, surveyor of the Province of Louisiana, August 6, 1800." This survey is filed in the records of the Notary Marc Lafitte, Vol. 14 f. 343 (368), November 28, 1819.

These sales by James Pitot to Chew and Relf and their subsequent sale to the Bank of Louisiana may have been in fact merely financial transactions. Perhaps Pitot was refinancing the cost of the property and the cost of construction of a new house. Certainly the house which still stands on the property is of the style being built in Louisiana in the 1811-13 period, a style derived from the earlier French plantation houses in the New Orleans area and in the French colony of San Domingo in the West Indies.

At any rate, the Bank finally sold the property on June 17, 1819 before the Notary Christoval de Armas. The purchaser this time was Albin Michel who bought the land "plus the house, buildings, circumstances and dependencies." The price paid by Albin Michel was \$8,250.00 The Bank had paid \$10,000 when they bought it from Chew and Relf in 1813 who in turn had paid \$16,000 to Pitot. When Pitot bought the front 200' property in 1810, the price was \$8,400, and he paid David Oliver \$2,000 for additional land on March 25, 1811, according to a plan attached to the act of sale.

In 1823 a property separation was obtained in the District Court between Albin Michel and his wife, Margerite Charlotte Cabaret. As a result of this legal action the Bayou St. John plantation was offered for sale. The advertisement for this sale which appeared in the Louisiana Gazette on April 19, 1824 said in part:

"... for sale at Elkin's Coffee House on Monday the 19th day of April next ... a Plantation situated at the Bayou St. John,

having 200 feet front on said Bayou . . . the said Plantation contains from thirty to forty superficial arpents. There is on the premises, a good two story dwelling house and several other buildings. . . . "

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At this sale the plantation was purchased by Madame Michel and thus remained in the family. An interesting event of the period of their occupancy was the visit of the noted French naturalist and artist, Charles Alexandre Lesueur of le Havre. He visited New Orleans several times in the years 1828-30 and made 200 sketches of New Orleans and its environs, sketches which are preserved in the Museum at Havre, a museum which Lesueur helped to establish. He made several sketches along Bayou St. John, including one entitled "View on Bayou St. John, taken from the house of Mr. Albin Michel." Perhaps among the numerous other sketches in the collection, there may be one or more of the house itself.

Albin Eusebe Michel died on January 10, 1839 at "his late domicile . . . situated at the Bayou Bridge." His wife had died before him and his property was inherited by their only son Henry Clement Albin Michel. The younger Michel later took up his residence in Paris, and through his New Orleans agents, sold the Bayou plantation to Felix Ducayet on August 17, 1848 before the Notary Theodore Guyol. At this time the property was described as being 208' in front on the Bayou, flanked by the properties of Robert Copland and Evariste Blanc. This act of sale mentions a survey drawn by Cornier, deputy surveyor general, on April 6, 1846. The price was \$10,000.

Nine years later Felix Ducayet lost the house as the result of a law suit (Alex Bonneval vs. Felix Ducayet, #11832, 2nd Dist. Court) and it was sold by the Sheriff on July 15, 1857 to Paul Joseph Gleises. The advertisement for the Sheriff's sale giving an excellent description of the house and its outbuildings, reads in part as follows:

"The building and improvements on said lot or portion of ground comprise a two-story dwelling, shingled roof, built partly in brick and partly in wood, with front and side gallery, with three rooms (one with a fireplace) and cellar and cabinet on the first floor; a one-story brick kitchen and oven attached to the dwelling; four large rooms with fireplace and cabinet on the second floor; overseer's house, frame stables, coach-house, cow-house, pigeon and chicken house, etc., splendid garden, orchard, hot house, cistern, wells, pumps, etc."

Gleises kept the property less than a year and on April 29, 1859, sold it to Jean Louis Tissot before the Notary Theodore Guyol. By this time Esplanade Avenue had been cut through the rear of the property and this sale only included a depth "to the prolongation of Esplanade street." The property was bounded "on the side nearest to the Bayou Bridge by the property belonging to the Widow and Heirs of Evariste Blanc, deceased, and on the other side by the property belonging to C. Ramos and to the Wardens of the Church of St. Louis." This adjacent property was part of that bought by the Church in 1849 from

Felix Labatut for St. Louis Cemetery No. 3, and being across Esplanade Avenue from the cemetery, was not used in that development. HABS LA 36-NEWOR 64-

Upon the death of Jean Louis Tissot in 1884, the house was inherited by his widow and his son, the noted Judge Aristee Louis Tissot, Judge of the late Second District Court for the Parish of Orleans and then Senior Judge of the Civil District Court. Judge Tissot had, in 1866 acquired the adjacent property, now also owned by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

In 1894, the Tissots sold the former Michel house and it was acquired by Louis Cucullu and a few months later by Raoul A. Cucullu (COB 152 p 247 and COB 158 p 36). In 1899 Joseph and Richard P. Steckler bought it (COB 174 p 564 and COB 173 p 795) and it was from Joseph Steckler that Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini bought it on July 11, 1904 (COB 198 p 659) for her Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

From the evidence contained in the records cited above, it would appear that this house may be, at least in part, the one that was built by Don Santiago Lorreins and said to be new in 1784. It is more probably a house built by James Pitot between 1810 and 1813. It is certainly the same house that Felix Ducayet lived in, seized from him, and sold by the Sheriff in 1858. A careful study and analysis of the structure itself might perhaps reveal further clues as to the antiquity of this architecturally and historically important old house.

The building was acquired by the Louisiana Landmarks Society during the summer of 1964 and moved approximately 150 yds. to a new site on Moss Street (1440 Moss Street); it is being restored by the Society.

Prepared by Samuel Wilson, Jr., FAIA
New Orleans, Louisiana
Summer 1964.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The original portion of the house is of a plan type common for the period in this region. The broad hipped roof and the colonnaded porticoes and balconies were also typical for southern Louisiana.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Number of stories and bays, over-all dimensions, layout: Two stories; seven bays (front) by four bays; 39'-4" x 60'-8" over-all dimensions; rectangular shape.

2. Foundations: Probably brick.
3. Wall construction: Solid brick masonry with stucco on first floor; brick between timber posts on second floor (two sides stuccoed and two sides with modern horizontal siding). Entire exterior painted white.
4. Structural system, framing: Masonry bearing walls with wooden joists framing first and second floor ceilings. Hipped roof framed with wooden rafters (note sheet No. 4, HABS drawing for cross section indicating portion of original roof framing contained within more recent framing system). Original and recent roof sheathing is of wood.
5. Porches: Stuccoed brick columns of first floor support second-floor porch on two sides. Second-floor porch has wooden framing, floor, and turned wooden columns. Open portico on first floor side later enclosed (see plan).
6. Chimneys: No chimneys appear either in attic or on roof.
7. Openings; Windows, doorways and doors: Original windows had wooden sash, six-over-six lights, and exterior wooden louvered shutters. Second-floor windows have segmental heads. Original doors occur in pairs, with three or four lights over a wooden panel, and small glass transoms. Second-floor doors are segmental headed. All shutters are exterior.
8. Roof; shape, covering: Hipped roof, covered with asbestos shingles and clay ridge tiles. Two dormer windows in front, one in rear. Original roof probably wooden shingles.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Two stories, each with five rooms. Recent additions and enclosures are indicated on HABS drawings. (Note first floor where portions of original walls have been demolished).
2. Stairways: Original location of stair shown on HABS drawings. Stair that now is in use is a modern addition and is located in recently constructed enclosure.
3. Flooring: First floor finished with asphalt tile; second floor has narrow, waxed boarding.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls, on both floors (with the exception of the additions and enclosures), are finished with plaster and painted in various pastel shades. The ceilings are plastered and painted white.

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5. Doorways and doors: Wooden four-panel (some with small lights over paneling) double doors.
6. Decorative features: Simple wooden trim that appears to be a replacement.
7. Heating: Modern gas heaters.
8. Lighting: Modern electric.

D. Site:

1. Orientation and general setting: In high school campus grounds, separated from academic area by board fence, and from Moss Street by a brick fence. The building overlooks Bayou St. John.
2. Landscaping and walks: Modern concrete walks and wooden covered walkway. Old brick paving in portico. Landscaping very simple, not original.

Prepared by J. H. Bolke, Jr., Architect
New Orleans, Louisiana
Summer 1964.

ADDENDUM TO:
MICHEL-PITOT HOUSE
(Holy Rosary Convent)
1370 Moss Street (moved to 1440 Moss Street)
New Orleans
Orleans Parish
Louisiana

HABS LA-1116
LA,36-NEWOR,64-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

This is an addendum to the eight-page historical report transmitted previously to the Library of Congress.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MICHEL-PITOT HOUSE

After the establishment of HABS in 1933, and its continuance under a tripartite agreement between the National Park Service, the American Institute of Architects, and the Library of Congress, the AIA nominated a member of their local chapters to lead the documentation effort in the thirty-nine districts under the HABS program umbrella. These district officers had already devoted years to recording examples of early American architecture, were active in local preservation initiatives, and typically had architectural practices dependent on a design and restoration business. Richard Koch of New Orleans, Louisiana, was one of these men.

Koch was an established restoration architect and was active in New Orleans's emerging preservation community. He was a member of the Vieux Carre Commission, an entity charged with design review of the nascent historic district beginning in 1925. His architectural firm, Armstrong and Koch, was responsible for the renovations at the River Road plantation, Oak Alley (HABS No. LA-71), and at Shadows-on-the-Teche (HABS No. LA-75) as well as the new construction of Le Petit Theater in New Orleans's French Quarter. The theater project was heralded as one of the first new buildings designed, sensitively, with an eye to the historic character of the neighborhood. He also collaborated with William Wiedorn and Enrique Alferez on the design for the city's botanical garden. Coinciding with his work for HABS, Koch guided the restoration of the Gauche-Gray House (HABS No. LA-125) on Esplanade; afterwards, he worked on the rehabilitation of the mansion house at Evergreen Plantation (HABS No. LA-1236).

As the district officer for Louisiana, Koch took photographs of various sites and encouraged research into local land records. The primary source material discovered in the archives was subsequently folded into the HABS record. Some of his photographs were included in a 1938 *Pencil Points* presentation of HABS work in the state; the *Pencil Points* publication came out in time for the AIA's annual meeting in New Orleans.¹ Not all of Richard Koch's photographs made it into the formal HABS collection at the Library of Congress, however. The HABS office in Washington has file copies of several of Koch's photographs dating from around 1936 to about 1941. Each print is mounted on a card and identified, but the negatives (and original pictures) remain elusive. Scans were

¹ For more on the HABS program, see Lisa Pfueller Davidson and Martin J. Perschler, "The Historic American Buildings Survey During the New Deal Era," *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 49-73; Catherine C. Lavoie, "Architectural Plans and Visions: The Early HABS Program and Its Documentation of Vernacular Architecture," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 13, no. 2 (2006/2007): 15-35; and Jessie Poesch and Barbara SoRelle Bacot, editors, *Louisiana Buildings, 1720-1940: The Historic American Buildings Survey* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1997).

made of the surviving photo mount cards and, for each site catalogued by Koch,
appended hereafter.



Joseph Reynes House,
1370 Moss St., New Orleans, Louisiana.
Richard Koch, Photographer.
HABS NO. LA-129



Joseph Reynes House,
1870 Moss St., New Orleans, Louisiana.
Richard Koch, Photographer.
HABS No. LA-129



Joseph Reynes House,
1370 Moss St., New Orleans, Louisiana.
Richard Koch, Photographer.
HABS No. LA-129